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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the act of mothering from the perspective of women who chose to work at home full time, as mothers of their own children and as family day care providers of very young children at risk of abuse and neglect. Through life history interviews, the study examined the caregivers' present and past lives, and explored the personal meaning of caregiving for these women. Life history interviews were conducted with 12 women who worked as family day care providers in an early intervention program for children between the ages of 4 weeks and 6 years who were at risk of maltreatment. The results of the interviews revealed that the women found meaning in what appeared to be the simplest acts of physical and emotional caregiving. They defined themselves in terms of relationships, especially mothering, and were exceptionally skilled in caregiving. Their caregiving appeared to be an expression of their religious life, which was embedded in their definition of self. They reported that their families had been extended and enriched through involvement in the caregiving project. Emerging from the life history interviews were five themes that give understanding to these women's lives, the caregiving of young children, and the meaning of caregiving for these family day care providers: (1) identity centered on mothering, caring, and loving; (2) the caregiver as artist; (3) the project's impact on the caregiver's family; (4) religion as the center of the caregiver's life and project involvement; and (5) caregiving as compensatory. (NB)

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A PROFILE OF CAREGIVING:

LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS OF FAMILY DAY CARE PROVIDERS

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A PROFILE OF CAREGIVING:
LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS OF FAMILY DAY CARE PROVIDERS

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1800s, as the new social science, psychology, came into being, the significance of childhood in the formation of personality was heralded (Freud, 1905; Hall, 1883). Concomitant with the burgeoning of this new scientific interest in childhood, children were barred from employment and required to attend school, laws which legitimized childhood as a separate stage in life. During this same period, the progressive movement encouraged by G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey (1902, 1916) promoted child-centered classrooms in which the teacher should be aware of the child's total development -- social, physical, intellectual and emotional. As childhood became a social category distinct from adults and requiring special attention, women in their mothering role became the guardians of the newly valued social-psychological realm of the child's development.

Throughout the twentieth century, child development has remained a dominant focus in the research, theory and clinical practice of psychology and education. The plethora of psychological case studies, theoretical and empirical literature continues to emphasize the crucial significance of mothering in this development. At the same time, however, the social sciences have not examined with the same care the actual experience of mothering, especially from the perspective of mothers. In spite of the dominant role of mothering in psychological theory, until very recently women have played only a minor role as theorists in the psychological or educational sciences; and recent writers have argued convincingly that there is a masculine bias at the very heart of developmental theory (Belenky et al, 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982).

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This paper examines the act of mothering from the perspective of women who have chosen to work at home full time, as mothers of their own children and as family day care providers of very young children at risk of abuse and neglect. Though life history interviews, this study examines these caregivers' present and past lives, and explores the personal meaning of caregiving for these women.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted life history interviews with twelve women who care for young children at risk of maltreatment. Initially I used an interview schedule designed to obtain life history information regarding three realms of the women's lives: their past and present family life, schooling and past and present religious life.

The interviews, which were tape recorded and transcribed, were from one and a half to three hours in length. As a starting point, I utilized the life history interview guide developed by Gluck (1977), questions developed by the Project at the University of Michigan (1977) and questions utilized by Belenky et al (1986). The interviews were designed to be open ended in order to allow the interviewees to tell their stories in their own words. At the outset I told each caregiver that I was interested in her experiences, and what she thinks is important about life, learning and development <u>from her perspective.</u>

These life history interviews are one strand of a series of ethnographic action research projects (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Cory, 1953; Elliot, 1978; Lewin, 1948)

that have been a central component of the Therapeutic Family Day Care Project. In data collection and analysis, I am following the interpretive social science tradition (Bernstein, 1976; Erickson, 1986; Fay, 1975; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Smith, 1979, 1986; Whyte and Whyte, 1984). Family day care providers are active participants in several strands of this action research. Twice monthly each provider completes an observational record of each child under their care. Project staff and providers collaborate in documenting the caregiving process and status of individual children. Twice monthly caregivers complete an observational record of each child under their care. Project staff conduct observations records of all actions, words and activities of children and providers during their visits to the homes every eight weeks. Providers write comments on staff observations and so too, staff write comments on all caregiver observations which are returned to them. Twice monthly, project staff meets with providers for a support/training session, in which ongoing happenings within the caregiving process are discussed. In 1986 and 1987, two graduate students conducted one hour interviews with eighteen family day care providers (including all 12 within this study). These interviews focused on the provider's perception of her caregiving process, the client children and family, perception of the project, and the project's impact on her family. The analysis of this life history study has triangulated the data from this series of action research projects, observational and interview, with the life history interviews.

The women studied have worked from one to three and a half years as family day care providers in an early intervention program, the Illinois Therapeutic Family Day Care Project, for children ages 4 weeks to 6 years (Klass, 1985, 1986). These children are at risk of maltreatment and are open cases of Illinois Children and Family Services, the state child protection agency which sponsors the program. The family day care providers care for one, two or three of these children, 7 hours a day for 35 hours each week. Project staff recruit, hire, provide initial and ongoing training. I designed and directed this program for four years.

RESULTS

An Overview of the Caregivers' Lives

The twelve family day care providers live in Southern Illinois, six in rural communities and six in factory towns. They are a diverse group, whose age ranges from twenty seven to forty nine years. Eleven are married, and one is a widow. All have children and two are grandmothers. Two have B.A. degrees, two are R.N.s, one has completed 10th grade in high school and the remainder have high school diplomas. A demographic profile of these women's current and childhood and adolescent lives is portrayed in Figure 1.

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A brief description of these women's relationships and experiences in school and church as children, adolescents and adults gives a fuller profile of these women's lives. The meaning of these relationships and experiences will be discussed in the analysis of dominant themes in these women's lives.

Family

There is a great deal of variation in the patterns of the caregivers' families of origin; however, there is more similarity in the patterns of their present family life.

Half of the women reported that they were very close to their mothers as they were growing up. Of those not close to their mothers, three of their mothers worked full time out of the home, and two, who were full time homemakers, rejected and physically abused their daughters.

Half of the women reported that there fathers were primarily absent from the home; whereas half were very close to their fathers during childhood and adolescence. Two fathers had sexually abused their daughters during their daughters' pubescence. Of the six women who were very close to their father, two were the women who had been physically abused and neglected as children by their mother.

All women have at least one sibling. Seven women reported they were very close companions with at least one of their siblings during childhood and adolescence; whereas five were either not close or in perpetual conflict with a sibling. As adults ten women reported that at least one of their siblings if not all are close companions. The other two women have siblings who are over ten years older and live in a distant state.

Those without close bonds to their mothers had other significant relationships. Extended family members were central figures in the lives of seven of these women during their childhood and adolescence. These women speak of many shared experiences with either grandmothers or an aunts. For three of the four women who were maltreated by a parent, either a grandmother or an aunt provided them with an alternative model to their own parent and incorporated them into their own family life.

Having chosen to be full time homemakers, these women's family relations are the center of their daily life. Eleven married caregivers (one caregiver's husband is deceased) have very close relations with their husbands. During most of the free time these men and women have from their work they choose to spend together, either recreating, engaging in religious activities with each other and their children, or visiting with their parents and siblings.

Friends

As they were growing up, nine women had very close relationships with friends their own age, and reported spending many hours playing with these friends. Two mothers of the childhood friends of one woman, who had been rejected and physically abused by her own mother, openned their homes her to as a child and offered her a surrogate model of maternal acceptance, nurturance and support. All caregivers speak of friendship as being central to their adult life. Their relationships with friends are the one experience outside the home that do not necessarily involve either husband or their own children.

Experiences in School

The impact of schooling on these women's lives seemed to be far less than had been anticipated. Five women gave strong statements of their dislike for schooling; and two spoke of school as being "noneventful." Dislike of school-

ing was described in terms of the classes being boring, teachers being of poor quality, and for one of these five, feelings of inadequacy. Five women spoke very positively of their schooling. Their descriptions highlighted teachers they thought were good, and these teachers' activities that they loved. As adults, five women (one of whom disliked school as a child) are active learners, reading for leisure and taking occasional courses.

Experiences with Religion

Six women report that religious activities were central to their lives with their family during adolescence and childhood. These activities included church services, church school, family prayer, and social activities within the church. Ten women are very involved in church activities as adults, as are their husbands and children. When these women prioritize that which they value most in life, God and church is first, and their family second. Their work with the Therapeutic Family Day Care is central to this religious life, and will be discussed in the forthcoming analysis.

THEMES OF THE CAREGIVERS' LIVES

Emerging from the life history interview are five themes that give understanding to these women's lives, the caregiving of young children, and the meaning of this caregiving for these family day care providers. These themes included first, identity centered on mothering, caring and loving; second, the caregiver as artist; third, the project's impact on the caregiver's family; fourth, religion as the center of the caregiver's life and project involvement; and fifth, caregiving as compensatory

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Self Identity centered on mothering, loving, and caring

When these caregivers describe their understanding of self and the experiences they find most meaningful in life, they define themselves in terms of mothering, caring and loving. Chodorow (1978) discusses the continuousness of the relational identification processes of women. "Not only are the roles which girls learn more interpersonal, particularistic, and affective than those which boys learn. Processes of identification and role learning for girls also tend to be particularistic and affective --embedded in an interpersonal relationship with their mothers." (177) When viewing the caregiver's childhood, we can see the relational basis for this self identity.

Half of the caregivers reported they were exceptionally close to their mothers throughout their childhood and adolescence.

> Sally: As far as I can remember my mom always has been just a tower of strength, very loving. And she always did creative, fun things for us when we were kids; you know, parties and she played with us. She always played with us and encouraged whatever we did. ...She was always there if I wanted to talk. I did talk with her about boyfriends and stuff like that. ...And now, I can talk to her about anything. And she's very encouraging about me as a mother and she shares--the older Joey (Sally's son) grows--she kind of shares stories that related with how I grew; and so I see more and more about the kind of parents they were when we were very young.

At first glance Chodorow's thesis seems contradicted by the six women who reported they were not, in fact, close to their mothers as young children. Yet

each of these women had childhoods enmeshed in other intimate relationships. They were close companions with their fathers and had close relationships with a grandmother or aunt, with whom they had frequent shared experiences. In their descriptions of grandmothers or aunt, caregivers seemed to see these women as an "ideal self".

> Marcy: My mother worked since I was two and my grandmother took care of us. My mother hates to cook. She hates housework. She can't understand why I would want to stay home. But my grandmother loved to cook; and she raised her five, an uncle's four, and more or less, my sister and myself. She was my favorite person in the world. ...my ideal.

> Tina: My mother's mom and dad came here (to her dad's farm) every weekend. And mama, that's what we called her, would play with us kids. I mean she would bring--we would have tea parties and she'd read us books. I remember her reading The Five Little Peppers and the Bopsey Twins as we were getting older, you know. And she would sit there and read those books, thick books. And she would play with us.

These caregivers have not read Carol Gilligan (1982) or Nell Nodding (1984); yet their narratives read as personifications of Gilligan and Nodding's work on women's understanding of relationships and caring. Nodding's work, Caring offers dimensions of caring that clarify's these women's understanding of self. Nodding speaks of motivational displacement as being at the core of caring. "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. To care is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard." (p.24)

> Interviewer: What are the important aspects of being a mother for you?

> Sally: Loving and playing and learning from my son. Probably just loving him. I like loving him more than I like anything else. And teaching him; and yet most of the teaching goes on peripherally.

> Interviewer: Can you play that out?

> Sally: Well he learns more on his own than me actively sitting down and teaching him. That's what I mean is I'm there as a guide and a buffer and maybe I can introduce experiences; but it amazes me as an adult, to step back and watch him learn on his own. ...I think I'm most fascinated right now by language development now that I have my own child and just watch it happen --its incredible! That's the part I love most. And he's old enough now that I'm really enjoying being able to tell him about things. I can talk to him about things we see when we're walking and he really absorbs information; and he's a book lover too. Loves to read stories. I love to do that too. And you know, the sun and he moon, he really is grasping the universe, some of the universe. Who can grasp it all? But he's noticing all those things. ...He loves to sing, so I can teach him songs too and fingerplays and he's kind of my creative outlet sometimes. You know? ...But I really love to see him with somebody else, with other children, away from me. I love to just sit around and just watch what he does without mother around. Because he's

different with me and he tests me, you know, a lot. And it's fun to look at him objectively when he's in a different setting and somebody else is the authority figure and not mommy.

Interviewer: Sally, how would you describe yourself to yourself?

Sally: Well I picture myself as a very loving person, just by nature. I'm not sure it's any special quality I've been given. And also very caring. ...I long to become an actvely caring person who can honestly respond to peoples' needs. ...

Sally's comments show that she is able to step outside her own reality to the reality of her son. She is observing, reacting, responsive and receptive to her son's needs, interests, and abilities and finds joy in giving him the experiences that spark his curiosity and development of new skills.

Nodding notes that the one caring finds pleasure not only in a child's growing competence, but also in the celebrating the ordinary everyday life and shared activities in which the child is a contributing member. Joy in shared activities is at the center of these caregivers' understanding of their mothering and their work with project children. Project staff's observations of Jean, her own two young children and project children over the past three and a half years illustrate this orientation. Since the children were 15 months, they regularly cook biscuits, muffins, or other simple dishes two or three times each week with Jean; similarly, they assist in setting and clearing the table, folding the laundry, and vacuuming. Jean is an active participant in much of the children's play --singing fingerplays, acting out favorite stories, medical role playing, outdoor games, etc. I asked Jean how she sees herself as a mother.

Jean: I see myself as a good mother in that I put my kids before me. You know, I try to think what is it that they need. Or what would be good for them. I'm either doing something with them or doing the laundry or something, but often they help me with those things too. While they're up, they're my first priority rather than whether or not I get to read my magazine. ...I value seeing them having a good time. I'm happy when I can watch them, see what they're going through. You know, I think I'm pretty good at taking a perspective on 'What does Ricky think of this and what's he going to enjoy?' And for me to do something that he really likes to do and to watch him have a good time is great! ...And just to be there for them. ...

Interviewer: Jean, how would you describe yourself to yourself?

Jean: Mostly I see myself as a mother of two kids, married to a banker. Easy to talk to, active--I like sports. ...I think of myself as a mother. Somebody who's always putting somebody else first. Children, most of the time...but others, you know. I try to think, what would that person like, how could I help that other person. ... I see myself in relationship with other people. You know, I don't see myself as myself, for me.

Nodding asserts that fundamental relatedness is "...at the very heart of our being." (51) She speaks of the ethical self as an "...active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one caring and cared for. It

is born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness. ...As I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself." (49) There is mutuality and reciprocity at the center of this relatedness.

This relatedness is at the center of caregiver's definition of self. Sally and Jean's narratives illustrate this sense of relatedness. The comments of Stephanie, the mother of three teen-agers and caring for two project children, extend this description.

> Stephanie: I think, as I see myself, my most important aspects are as a parent, as a mother. If I'd say I think that's what I want to be, as somebody would say about me--'Well, she's good mother.' And relationships are more important to me than anything else. I feel like if I didn't have a strong relationship with my kids and at least working on a good one with my husband, making that a priority, nothing else I would master or accomplish would mean much to me. Yet I know, besides being a mother and a wife, my strongest joy in life comes from something I accomplish for myself, by myself. And it doesn't matter if it's losing three pounds or if it's getting an 'A' in one of my classes. And yet, I know an important part of me is the need for being able to, the give and take. I like being with people. I like being around people. I love the farm atmosphere here. The fact that we all work as a family, we work together. And it goes back to that interdependency...that we all are part of the same unit that plays together and works together, and we all see the same goal in sight. We don't all go on our own separate ways all the time; and yet there is room for each of us to be our own person and pursue many different interest.

Nodding notes: "The one caring is first and foremost committed to receiving. Listening, the supremely important form of receiving is essential. The central importance of dialogue in nurturing the ethical ideal--talking to the child of his feelings--his own, hers and others--training for receptivity involves sharing and reflecting aloud." (p. 121) The open, reflexive sharing among those who care is evident in caregivers' descriptions of their adult friendships, which each woman sees as a central part of her life.

> Cynthia: I have so many wonderful friends. I am just so blessed. The friends that I have, I never would have expected such love. Fran is a social worker and she and I are so different. And she stretches me and I stretch her because she's a single person who lives alone, who has travelled the world and done all kinds of stuff. And that's not who I am. I'm a family woman, you know, a family person who, I mean, I just want to be home. I'm not a world traveller and don't even have any desire for that. But yet, I give to her and she gives to me; and our relationship is just wonderful. She tells me all and I tell her all. And I have other friends; I have a lot of close friends that share very deeply with me. I'm just really blessed in my adult relationships.

> Sally: Friendship to me, to be a friend you really have to give. And give without thinking sometimes and just give of yourself. And you have to be trusting and you have to trust that person. And you have to be honest. And above all you just really have to love that person. And as far as I'm concerned, it holds the same for a friendship that it holds for a marriage. You have to be committed;

you have to have a commitment to that friendship to make it work. I have a really dear friend. She lives in Iowa. And when you say friend, she comes to mind because we have been incredibly close for almost ten years now, which really amazes me to say that. ... We have come to know each other so well that you just can anticipate movements, thought, everything.'

These women have strong marriages. When they discussed their marriage with me, I asked what they thought was the most important aspect of their marriage. Caregivers uniformly they spoke first of communication within their marriage.

Emily: I think communication is very important in a marriage; and love, naturally. I think communication. As long as you communicate with one another, and let each other know what's on your mind rather than keeping it bottled up inside. I think its the best way. Dan will listen to what I have to say and we don't always agree, you know, with one another. But yet, I know that he'll listen to what I have to say. We'll kind of weigh things out.

Linda: Communication is most important. I think that's why we've never had any problems. Because if we don't like something, we're not afraid to talk about it. You know, we're secure enough with one another that he'll listen to me and I'll listen to him and we might not agree, but we both voice our opinions.

As we listen to these women, we learn that their conception of self is rooted in relatedness to others. They value communication, understand the interdependency of relationships, and are able to step outside their own personal frame of reference. They experience joy in the activities of everyday life, in their daily shared activities with small children, they are artists.

Caregiver as artist

These women are artists in their work with young children. They are spontaneous, and very playful in their interactions with the children. The interactions are playful, often a combination of caregiver playing with the child and playing with her own behavior.

Sally is sitting on the living room floor across from project child, Jeff (20 months). On the floor are three small plastic lids from refrigerator cartons. Sally puts a lid on her head and on Jeff's head. Sally asks as she puts a lid on Jeff's head: "Do you think it will stay?" He grins and as the lid falls off his head, he gleefully laughs. Sally then stacks two lids together and places them on Jeff's head as she whispers, " Now I'll put two hats on you." Immediately Jeff shakes his head so that the lids fall to the floor. Sally and Jeff both laugh. Then Sally hands Jeff two lids as she asks, "Can you stack two together." Jeff immediately puts one on Sally's head and one on his head and they both shake their heads so that the lids fall. Sally looks very surprised and loudly says, "oh, no!" as Jeff chuckles gleefully. They continue playing this game for about three more minutes.

For the two years Sally was a caregiver before moving to a neighboring state, she remained an artist an improvising in play with young children. As Jeff grew older, Sally also cared for another toddler; and the three would often

engage in role playing. Creative movement, such as pretending to have fins, space boots, and cycle boots, or pretending to be various animals were favorite activities. When I interviewed Sally, her description of her mothering as quoted earlier, captures her love for playing with young children. After describing herself as mother, Sally concluded: "I see myself as a playful person. I would rather spend my days playing that I would doing anything else."

Not all caregivers were as spontaneous as Sally; yet in their own way, each enjoyed interacting with the children. Jean did not become immersed as an active participant as did Sally, but was very skilled in creating activities where she facilitated the children's active play. A shoebox and church offering envelopes would become props for writing letters to parents and grandparents and mailing them. A purse with hair curlers would spark beauty shop play. Dorothy created more traditional 'learning games' such as matching paint sample shapes to paint sample cards. But Dorothy was quick to shift gears when toddlers would adapt the given game, such as shifting to hiding the cards behind their back and gesturing with their hands "all gone." Dorothy would then search for the cards and the game would become hide and seek.

Sequences are repeated and the children increase their range of participation. For example, Emily often used a medical prop box. Initially the children focused on using the stethescope and cloth bandages. As time progressed, the role definitions became more complex, and the children and Emily would create imaginary accident scenes causing the ailments. Initially there was only the doctor (child) and patient (Emily). But with time, the children enjoyed being patient or nurse and the illnesses and wounds became more complex.

With infants, the caregivers are quick to exagerrate facial expressions, voice tone, and actions in harmony with the young child's actions and expressions of affect--a joyful choregraphy, a dialectic of mutual feedback between adult and child. There is often an ebb and flow to the interactions--sequences of high and low key, calm activity and attention. Daniel Stern (1977) beautifully describes this interaction with mothers and their infants during the infants first six months. Stern notes:

> ...being a primary caregiver is more like being a creative artist than anything else, performing in your own work as you create it: a choreographer-dancer or composer-musician. (132)

These women are expressing themselves in their work with young children. They are very skilled, and in this self expression through caregiving, they find fulfillment. Given the fact that the project children enter with marked developmental delays, delays which can be remediate with loving, consistent caregiving, the caregivers are affirmed as they see these positive gains in the children as a result of their self expression in caring.

Project's impact on caregivers' family

These women have chosen to be full time homemakers and have their family as the center of their daily life. Once they are involved in the Therapeutic Family Day Care Project, their commitment and caring is expanded beyond their family, and inevitably changes their daily family routine. Given these changes, it is important to ask, what is the impact of the project on the members of the caregivers' lives.

Upon their initial involvement about half of the caregivers reported that their parents were upset with their work. During a provider support/training session, they described some of their parents' responses.

> These people are on a free ride from the government.
>
> What's the mother doing? Is she sick? Why isn't she working? Why don't they make her take care of her kids?
>
> I wish we would have had somebody to watch our kids when we were raising them and working long hours.
>
> Everybody knows the Olds (project family). The dad always is bragging about how much money the government gives them.

Caregivers' parents living in rural farm communities or having worked in industry their entire lives have negative views of people in poverty receiving public assistance. They maintain a value tradition reminscent the frontier Protestant ethic of rugged individuals, hard work, self reliance and self determination. Most are religious people embracing the Calvinist view that God's grace is evidenced through hard work. Given this perpective, providers' parents initially were perplexed about their daughters' project involvement. Nevertheless, once caregivers were involved in the project, many of these same parents enjoyed assisting their daughters--cutting a child's hair, having the children pick apples at their orchard, baking a cake for a child's birthday, etc.

In contrast to the caregivers' parents' perspective, all of their husbands support their project involvement; and in fact, husbands and children are actively involved with the children. Several caregivers speak positively of their family being expanded and enriched.

> Sally: The project has really stretched us which has been good. It's brought us in contact with people, like Lucy, who are really street-smart. It's been a real education. It's been a growing experience in that I've really learned a lot about another way of life. It's stretched my family in that we've managed to include someone else. I'm glad I stumbled onto the project because I don't want to just be wrapped up in my own little world. My husband has really accepted it. He was leary at first, because he knew what kind of people we'd be dealing with. He was scared for me. He thought it would be a risk, which it turned out to be. But he loves Jeff like his own son. He'd take him in in a second if we could. So it's been a good experience for all of us. It's been great for Joey (Sally's son) because it's so positive for him to have other children around. And you can see the difference in him. At first I thought that I would want to keep my first baby all to myself. But I soon learned to trade in that solitude for the interaction of other children.
>
> Interviewer: So you see it as a good experience for Joey to play with other children.
>
> Sally: Yes. Jeff came when Joey was about 4 months old; and he loved to hold him and feed him. Occassionally Jeff's life will be a burden though. Every once in awhile I'll bring that burden home to

my family. That's been happening especially the last few months when Jeff wasn't being well cared for and he regressed. He regressed emotionally, physically, and in every way. It was really hard to see and deal with; and I brought that frustration home a lot. That's the only time I can remember the experience not being a positive one.

Cynthia: The project's enriched our family. It's been very good for my husband David. (David does shift work and is actively involved in caregiving every other week.) It's added a dimension to him because we can't have any children. It makes me sad because we can't have children, because I think he would be, he is a good father to Seth (her 14 year old), but with a young child, it's different. David even says on the week he's on days that he misses them (project children). And occasionally I'll keep them a little bit later just so he can see them, you know. So it's added a new dimension to us. And for Seth, one of the neatest things he said, "Mom, you're probably the best thing that ever happened to these kids." And that was very nice. Seth wishes they were white (laughter). "Why don't you get some that don't have roaches and are white?" That's what he told me (laughter). Otherwise he likes them. But they're good for Seth too. Seth's real good with little kids and he plays and rough-houses with them. But he's jealous sometimes. Like last night I had milk and he wanted to drink it all. I said, "Well, I've got to have it for the kids in the morning for cereal." And he goes, "All you care about is those kids," you know, but that's inevitable. I mean, he's always going to be a little bit jealous of them, you know. He's glad he's an only child, he always tells me (laughter). But for the whole family, it has been a good thing because what it is is it's made us more giving. ..Maybe it's a little drop in the pebbles, but I'm doing something. And I think as a family we're doing something.

Husbands' involvement with project children is dependent upon their work position. Half of the husbands eat lunch with their wives and project children each day. Beyond providing a nurturant male model for these children, the husbands often give their wives a brief respite from their caregiving responsibilities.

Jean: My husband always enjoys Nancy (project child) a lot, because Nancy gets real excited whenever he comes home for lunch. He gets home when we're about half way through with dinner, and he has an apple or an orange or something for dessert and shares it with the kids. They're always tickled. He enjoys it. And it is nice to have him home for dinner. I can usually get the dishes done before the kids lie down for their naps because he is here to watch them or read them a story or whatever.

Cynthia and Dorothy's husbands are involved in shift work and thus are home about half of their caregiving days. When home these husbands are actively involved in caregiving. While Cynthia picks up the children each morning, her husband cooks everyone's breakfast. He has made the children toy shelves, sandbox and outdoor swings, a cradle for the 6 week old infant, and simple toys like pegs and pegboards. Occasionally Cynthia and her husband take the children on 'field trips', to the local pet store, grocery or hardware store,

Dorothy's husband often joins in the children's activities.

> Dorothy: Denny plays with the kids. He'll get down on the floor and play with the Fisher-Price little people, and he dances and carries on. He acts silly sometimes, but the kids love it.

Over the years, several other husbands of project caregivers have had shift work, and uniformly, they have been active participants in caregiving. In these families, the decision for project involvement has been a joint husband and wife commitment, with the wife managing the major responsibility, but the husband actively involved.

Husbands whose work schedule is during caregiving hours also have interacted with project children, though less frequently. When families go on outings during the weekend, project children often are included. Caregivers have taken project children on overnite camping trips. If a project child is severely ill, or there is a difficult situation within the project child's home, caregivers will have the project children overnite (with the children's mothers' written permission). At their husband's request, several caregivers occasionally bring the project children to their husband's worksite (e.g. construction company, school bus company, federal office building). These patterns of husbands' involvement in their wives project work seems a variant of Schien's (1978) "accomodation" within dual-career families.

Caregivers' children also have been participants in activities with project children. Sally and Jean's children are infant and toddlers. When asked how the project has impacted her child, Jean replied: "Ricky thinks that the day care children are his sisters. He tells everyone he has three sisters: Nancy, Cindy, and Tammy. Ricky really enjoys having the other children around." Both Sally and Jean have taken their project children on family outings and have had the children overnite.

The other caregivers have elementary aged and adolescent children. Stephanie and Marcy have each paid their daughters to assist in childcare during the summer.

> Stephanie: During the summer, Annie, my daughter and another 9 year old who stays with us during the school year; we've had her two years; they are both on the payroll. They are my assistants. They earn $2.00 a day each and they help with everything. They play with the kids, and interact with them. I think the things that they've learned are invaluable. They always are observing and picking up on things.

Caregivers are expected to care for project children for seven hours daily; however, several keep the children longer because their own children are eager to be with the project children after school. A common thread among many caregivers' comments relates to their children's development of an awareness of poverty and a compassion for the children's lives. Several caregivers' families are themselves earning relatively low incomes, and these women report that their adolescents now don't seem to complain about not always having what they want. Caregivers also speak of seeing a new strand of generosity in their children.

> Marcy: Wil is ten years, and as the fifth child, always seemed a bit spoiled. But he has been so giving with these kids. And he gets

so upset if he thinks they are being mistreated or neglected at home. He keeps saying about the one child that finally was put in foster care, : "Can't we keep her? She can share my room." It helps him to not be selfish.

Not all caregivers' children have been enthusiastic about the project children. Those caregivers' children who are the youngest of families with three, four or five children, initially see project children as intrusions; and caregivers report that initially their own children are more problematic than the project children. That is, these youngest children often were fussy and demanding when needing to share their mother's time and their toys with project children. In each case, this pattern has dissapated after a few months.

In America personal life often is separate from work, and the family has become a major sphere in which the individual is foremost. Critics (Lasch, 1977; Poster, 1978; Zaretsky, 1973) often speak of the privatization and emotional overloading of the modern, isolated American family. The work of caregivers in the Therapeutic Family Day Care Project seems to be a negative instance of this pattern. For these women and their families have extended themselves to include maltreated children within their daily family life.

Religion as central to caregivers' lives and project involvement

For ten of the women studied, religion is a dominant theme in their lives. When they prioritize that which they value most in life, God and church are first, and their family second. They often take a religious perspective when describing events, thoughts or feelings in their lives. The project children and friendship are seen as a "blessing", one's problems are seen as "in His hands," and one's good fortune as a "miracle from God." Most of these women's meaning system is religious; however, a person's meaning system or perspective may be other than religious, such as aesthestic, scientific, intellectual, political, etc. Geertz (1973) speaks of the religious perspective as one of major perspectives by which people construe their world. His explanation of perspective clarifies our understanding of these women's religious life.

> A perspective is a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of "see" in which it means "discern," "apprehend," understand," or "grasp." It is a particular way of looking at life, a particular manner of construing the world. (110)

These women's religious perspective provides first, a definition of self; second, a mythos; and third, a transcendent experience. A brief discussion with illustrative vignettes will clarify these three strands of their religious life.

The caregivers, their husbands and children are active members in a local church. They gain a feeling of selfhood through their acceptance within a community, which feels like acceptance by God, and gives them a reference community for their daily life.

> Cynthia: When I was growing up, church was our lives. There was an organization called Legion of Mary and even in my grade school years, I was a Legion of Mary member. And Bob (her husband) and I just started Legion of Mary at our church, you know. I believe I was bonded from the very beginning. You know, as I was bonded to my parents, I was bonded also to my Catholic religion. You know, and

what my mom told me one time--in tears, she said, "Dad and I realized we couldn't give you much, but we could give you your faith." You know, and I think she's right. I can't answer for any of my ten brothers or sisters, but I know from me, that they were right.

Emily: Church is a big part of our life, you know. We all go to church, Dan and I, and the kids, naturally. We go on Sundays; we go on Tuesday and we go on Thursday. We have many friends in our church; and now all my brothers gradually, every one of them joined.

Second, religion provides a mythos; that is, a map of interpersonal and intrapsychic reality. For the caregivers, this mythos is mediated by a concrete ideal, Jesus, who gives them a model of their best self.

Sally: It's a continual process for me to know more and more, to know Jesus more and more. Because He's very real and I mean, I base everything I do on the fact that He is who He said He is and how that affects my life and how then I am to live in response to what he's done for me.

Interviewer: Can you play that out?

Sally: Sure. ...I very truly feel that Jesus is the son of God, that he did come to earth, that everything said in the scriptures is true, especially in the gospels, and that his dying with all the world's sin so that we might live--that's true. I believe that and so I base my life's response to that, on living for him, in loving for him. And the way I do that is not teaching Sunday School, going to church, or standing on the street corners. My response to what Jesus has done for me and the whole reason I feel he came is to love the people around us, to be honest, to give them the truth that's so important to their life. ...I feel the most important thing we do as Christians is live Jesus day to day in each encounter. That's where it all comes down to. The people we have, the family we are, you know, that we love within that family and forgive and learn to live in that way.

Third, religion provides a transcendent experience by which the self is linked to the eternal world. Psychodynamically, the sense of transcendence is a blend of inner and outer reality, and feels as both inside the self and outside the self. Winnicott (1965, 1972) speaks of such a space as the transitional object. Winnicott speaks of transitional objects as providing this experience between the inner and outer reality, a continuation of the internalized mother figure. It is derived from but not reducible to the internalized mother figure. When these women pray, they return to a transcendent space which provides them with security and comfort.

Cynthia: My faith is so much a part of my life. I can't imagine my life without my faith. I go to daily mass every day. My relationship with God is utmost, you know, the most important thing in my life, even past David (her husband). Prayer is the very core of me, my prayer and meditation time. I wake up each morning, the very first thing I do is spend time with the Lord.

Sally: I pray just day in and day out, more just conversationally than at any pointed time of the day.

Interviewer: When you say day in, day out, can you explain what you mean?

Sally: Well, I just mean, that's where my thoughts go through the day. If there's something that needs to be prayed about--I guess that's one part of my life right now that I'm working on. When you ask where it is now for me, it's trying to make Jesus a part of my everyday life. Just in taking everything to him. The latest example was the musical. I had a whole day of stuff just all stacked up and all these details that had to be worked out; and I just couldn't do it; and I just finally realized that he's a God of details and cares about even those littlest things in my life as much as he cares about the big things. ... And I knew I couldn't do it by myself and I just, at the beginning of the day, I just gave him those details and said, "This needs to be done, this needs to be done, this needs to be done, and I just refuse to be an anxious-ridden person today," and I just forgot about it after that. I went about and just started doing everyting that had to be done and all of a sudden the details came together ....every detail was done at the end of the day and I was not an anxious-ridden person. Everything fell together.

Caregivers see their work in the project as an expression of their religious life.

Stephanie: I got into the therapeutic daycare because, that morning you called ...I had gone through a hard time with Head Start, and had gotten layed off because they'd lost the program and I was in a real stage of not knowing, really which way to turn. I had been substitute teaching and I knew I didn't want to continue doing that--I wanted something more than that. And that morning you called I had watched Phil Donahue and his guest was speaking of child abuse. I wasn't even interested in what you had to tell me about the project because I said, "Hey, this is right " because I really did feel like that was God's plan. I felt like that had been a direct guide because just that morning, as I watched T.V., I've always felt really pulled toward children in different aspects. Yeah, I do feel like there's daily guidance, and I do depend on that.

Cynthia: There came a place in my life where I wanted to do more. I just had something in me that wanted to do more. And to give, to give to others. And when this project came up, I knew that this was what I was supposed to do. And what I've found is I've never felt so much where I was supposed to be. And it's not that it's not a hard job and it's not that some days I'm exhausted or whatever, but I just feel real centered in the job. Because I drew closer to my religion and to God, I can do this job. I don't think I could, without it. I know I couldn't. I have to go to daily mass and have prayer meditation because oftimes it is a real hard, difficult job. And to be able to leave those kids and not walk off with them. You know, I have to leave those kids, and I couldn't do it without my religion. I couldn't do it without knowing that God is in the middle of all this and taking care. That's how come I'm working with these kids in the first place.

These women are able to transcend the private home world of our modern society. They are able to make up for deficits in their own childhood. They are able to find meaning in the simplest acts of physical and emotional caregiving. They are able to bring their spouses, children and wider family into the caring. They can do so because they live in a world which is unified for them by their religious faith. Their map of reality includes not only their history and the social world given to them at birth, but it also includes the invisible reality which ties their life to the Ultimate. They feel that Ultimate in the wordless prayer they experience daily; and they feel that Ultimate in the bond they form with the children entrusted to them.

Caregiving as compensation for childhood maltreatment

Four of the twelve women interviewed were maltreated as children, two having been physical abused and rejected by their mother, and two having been sexually abused by their father. These women seem to identify with the maltreated children for whom they care, and find fulfilment in this caring.

Emily is a thirty six year old mother of three children. Emily is the middle of five children, the only girl. From Emily's description, her mother seems to have a manic-depressive personality. Emily was the only child in the family rejected by her mother.

Emily: My mother always kept me in the house or up in my room away from her. Any time I would open my mouth to my mother, I got smacked. And I'd get sent up to my room or something, you know. And so in kindergarten it took me three months -- they had me in therapy because I would not open my mouth to anyone. Because I was so afraid... the teacher..I was afraid that whenever I talked to anybody (this is the theory I had as a child), whenever I would talk to anybody that they were going to smack me. ...As a child I was so afraid of my mom. I didn't know what kind of mood she was going to be in. Usually I'd come in from school and she'd say, "What do you want?", you know, like that. So I just kind of would go off to myself, you know...

CSK: And try to be invisible.

Emily: Yeah. And I would do anything, Carol. Anything. I know what it is to not have the love of a mother. And I guess that's why my heart just goes out for Jerry, you know. Because I know what it feels like. And my heart just goes out for kids like that. Because all my life I had craved my mother's love and never could gain it.

Sarah also was rejected and physically abused by her mother. Sarah was the youngest of four girls, and also the only child that was maltreated. The family's third daughter was frail and "...sickly, with asthma and all that kind of stuff." Sarah , the fourth child, is large boned and muscular, and she describes her love of being a tomboy and outdoors helping her dad on the farm. Sarah explains that probably her mom beat her so often because she was stubborn. She reports that her dad once said to her: "If you bend a little bit like them hickory sticks mom uses on you, you'd get along a lot better."

Sarah: And my dad would have whelps on him.

CSK: Why would he have whelps on him?"

Sarah: When mom would begin hitting me, I'd run to dad and she just wouldn't stop. She'd keep hitting him. She broke a broom handle over his shoulders one time, trying to get me. ...But it was always me, it was not any of the kids she had there. (Children her mother cared for or her siblings.) She was not mean to any of those kids...So, I say, I might have been a little stubborn...I just don't remember doing anything to aggravate her.

Like Emily, Sarah finds compensation for lack of her own maternal love through work with maltreated young children.

Sarah: I think, well, maybe I can make up for some of the stuff that I missed. And you know what? I think it helps me to, for myself, in my heart and soul I guess. Because these little kids, boy can they love you. When they wrap their arms around you, it's just like a piece of butter melting into your soul, I guess you'd say. It gives me a gratification or whatever you call it. It makes me feel good. Makes me feel like a part of my life that was missing isn't missing. And I really enjoy the kids. ... I think I've learned a lot about myself and my cause in life. I've tried to figure it out, with having kids around me. Over different things that have happened to them and trying to figure out, I'm always wondering why. I always ask myself: 'Why do they do this to this little kid?' And I find out something about myself with the kids. Maybe that's why I have the kids, I don't know.

Linda and Dorothy each were sexually abused by their father during the onset of pubescence. Both women speak of their fulfilment in caring for project children; though unlike Emily and Sarah, neither explicitly links their work with their own maltreatment. Linda tells me that she would "...care for these children the rest of my life, I love it so."

Dorothy: ...It's a blessing. I feel like I'm doing something, something good. ...And I know the children need me, and I like to be needed. The project's made us all happier. My husband loves the idea. He's on shift work and home several days each week. He loves playing with the kids."

These four women are very skilled in their work with very young children. This pattern is a critical perplexity, a major negative instance, for much of the abuse literature suggests the "social inheritance" of abuse. Their childhoods seem to be clear examples of what Alice Miller (1983) describes as "poisonous pedagogy" and thus should give evidence in adulthood, of marked personality disturbance. Each reported that in childhood, they had a close relationship with a <u>significant other</u> who provided the unconditional love denied by their abusive parent. Furthermore, through relationships with a significant other, the women could react appropriately to the hurt, humiliation, and coercion and thus integrate their childhood abuse into their personality rather than repress their feelings. Alice Miller (1981) notes: "A child can only experience his feelings when there is somebody who is there who accepts him fully, under-

stands, and supports him." (p.10) Sarah and Emily's fathers were not strong enough to confront their wives with their abuse and rejection of their daughters, but each man gave unconditional love, support and a vehicle for their daughters to express rather than repress their feelings of pain and confusion.

Sarah's description of her childhood relationship with her father is illustrative.

> Dad was working all the time; and I'd go to be with him. I was with the machinery or with the horses. I was like a tomboy. If he went to sell corn in the truck, I was in the truck. I was nine years old driving the truck in the cornfield. I would chuck corn, pick corn, and I drove a team and a wagon.
>
> ...Dad was my superhero. He was an older guy, and he worked from morning 'til night. And I can remember him coming in and sitting in his chair with these bib overalls on; and he would be sleeping. And I would have a comb and curlers and I would curl his hair. And mom would spank me for it. And he says, "Charlotte, leave her alone. That's what puts me to sleep." He didn't have hardly any hair. Bald spot here and two little wigs here. But I'd curl it. I don't know why. I'd sit there -- just to be close to my dad, I guess. Sometimes, if I didn't feel good, I'd just sit on the floor by him and lay my head on his knees. He was such a hard-working old guy. Everybody else had a tractor and he had a team of mules; that's what he had to plow with.
>
> ...I've got a picture of my dad, and I'm little--maybe a year old. And I'm laying in the yard and my dad's leaning down with something over his shoulder; and I guess it's his sack coming from work. My dad would say to me: "God sent me an angel to love and I just picked her up off the ground." So everytime I look at that picture, I think of that, you know. And he told me that from a little girl on, so I just figured God sent me to my dad to be loved. He tried to make up for the affection mom didn't show."

Emily's early life has common threads to that of Sarah. Her father also worked long hours -- at the railroad, and on the week-ends, at a department store. Emily always was certain of her father's unconditional love.

> I always had my dad that stood by my side, that helped me out a lot. He would always take time out, just what little time he would have; he would always take time out to be with me. Take me out for a walk or we'd sit outside and talk, you know, and ask me if I had anything I wanted to talk about to him. ...He knew exactly what was going on, but he was just caught right there in the middle. Dad didn't want to take my side because he had my mom to deal with. And he didn't want to take her side because of me. In the summertime, dad would send me off, to go down with my grandma so I could get some peace myself. Grandma lived in the country (Ozarks). It was beautiful there. There were other children that I got to play with. After kindergarten, dad sent me down there for a year. And grandma would tell me that my mother was a very sick woman.
>
> And in my teenage years, I used to go over to my friends' house and their mother became my mother. I would call them "mom." And I am

still very close to these friends and their mothers.

Sarah and Emily received respect, understanding, and sympathy from their fathers such that they could gain ownership of their feelings and avoid complete repression and accompanying development of crippling defense mechanisms. In Alice Miller's terms, each woman had "...internalized an affectionate and empathic self-object." (p.21) As a result, as adults they did not become "prisoners" of their own childhood; but rather, could identify with maltreated children and provide them that unconditional maternal love they had lacked as young children.

Whereas Sarah and Emily's maltreatment existed as early as they could remember, Linda and Dorothy's maltreatment by their father was in pubescence; and each woman did have a strong bond with their mother. Like Sarah and Emily, Linda and Dorothy had significant others to compensate for their parents' maltreatment.

Linda was ten when her father began sexually abusing her. Linda's father also abused her older sister, who became pregnant with her father's baby. When Linda was eleven, her mother learned of this pregnancy, and committed suicide. Linda describes how her mother's suicide and fathers' sexual abuse of her and her sister were front page headlines for what seemed to be forever. After rigorous work by Linda's mothers' siblings, they finally got action to prosecute her father who was sent to prison for fifteen years. When her father went to prison, Linda was adopted by her aunt and uncle, who provided her with a strong, stable family life on "the other side of town" in a different school district. The notoriety of Linda's maltreatment and her father's imprisonment no doubt allowed her to integrate this maltreatment into her personality, and prevent repression and accompanying development of debilitating defense mechanisms. Linda remains very close to her two siblings and her aunt and uncle and cousins with whom she lived. Her husband is from the same rural community and they "went together" for five years before marrying immediately after high school. Linda explains that initially her husband's family refused to allow him to data Linda, given her notoreity; however, her husband prevailed and now she is close friends with his family.

Dorothy's sexual abuse by her father involved four occasions of fondling . This maltreatment was never acknowledged in the family; and in fact, when she confronted her father several years ago, he denied it. However, Dorothy had told her mother, to whom she was very close. Her mother offered her affirmation and support; however she did not confront her husband. Dorothy explained:

> When I told mom she just broke down and cried. Now mom was that type, very religious and took the wedding vows very seriously -- 'til death do us part. She did not believe in divorce at all. She was taught by him that whatever I say, you do, you know. He was a very demanding husband -- that I am king and you are just like a slave...really. It was really a hard life. There was a lot of crying, I remember. And he always had affairs with other women. ...and then it had to have been luck, God's way, Jim came along. We met when I was fourteen. We dated, well, we saw each other -- most of the time. Then I started dating Jim when I was sixteen. And then we got married after high school; and then, a year and a half, we had Gina. And I said -- I've always believed that things will work out because I've seen so much in the past. Things do work out.

Dorothy became very close to Jim's parents and his siblings when she was dating

Jim as an adolescent. As adults she and Jim remain close to his family and she sees them as her closest friends.

During the childhood of these four women, they each knew that 'things could be another way.' With significant others, they were able to experience and develop their own emotions and individuation was made possible through the love of a significant other. In Winnicott's (1971) terms, they found "good enough" mothering in the surrogates. As adults, their marriages are strong, and their their daily life centers around their husband and children. Their work with project children seems to provide them compensation for their own childhood maltreatment as they identify with these small maltreated children and give them unconditional love, emotional support, and an alternative experience of family life.

Conclusion

Over the past four years, the Therapeutic Family Day Care Project has been a cost effective early intervention program for successfully remediating the developmental delays of young abused and neglected children. Remediation is possible through good enough parenting soon enough. The caregiver is the linchpin of remediation. Good enough parenting involves bonding and interaction. To understand what makes this successful program possible we need to understand the caregivers--their lives, and their definition of self and world. This study's life history interviews of twelve of these caregivers gives us a beginning understanding of the caregivers, and the personal meaning of their work in the project.

These twelve women find meaning in what appears to be the simplest acts of physical and emotinal caregiving. They define themselves in terms of relationships, especially mothering, and are exceptionally skilled in this caregiving. Their caregiving is an expression of their religious life, which is embedded in their definition of self. Their families have been extended and enriched through project involvement.

The need for out-of-home childcare for infants, toddlers and preschoolers in America increases at an accelated rate each year. This need far outstrips the availability of quality out-of-home child care. As we try to speak to this need, work toward a national policy of out-of-home child care, and increasingly involve public schools in educating the very young, we need to look at issues of personnel. As we look toward new policies and new programs, we can learn much from those many women who have chosen to work with the very young.

Notes

1. Adrienne Rich (1986) distinguishes two meanings of motherhood: first, the potential relationship of women to her powers of reproduction and to children and second, the institution, which allows only certain views and certain expectations. This study examines the first meaning of motherhood through the lived experiences and shared thoughts of twelve women. No doubt the institution of motherhood has determined some of these women's views, experiences and relations. Though such an analysis would add significant understanding to a profile of these women's lives, it is not within the purview of this exploratory study,

2. Feminists may find these women's lives disturbing, for they seem to typify the mother depicted in the "Ozzie and Harriet" ideal of the 1950s so frequently critiqued by feminists. In fact, I asked these women their views of the feminist movement; and without exception, this movement has seemingly "passed them by." I was left with the question: is the feminist movement the luxury of educated, middle and upper middle class women? In reality, the majority of these women's husband's had occupations which were not self fulfilling. In turn, most of these men became very involved in the project, and in fact, received fulfilment from this involvement. Since these interviews were conducted, two couples have become foster parents of infants having teenage mothers, who consented to this arrangement; and one couple has adopted a toddler at the request of her mother.

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